

United States Post Office Building
Southwest corner of Broad and Meeting Streets
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-293

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

RECEIVED
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UNITED STATES POST OFFICE BUILDING

Address: Southwest corner of Broad and Meeting Streets,
Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina.

Original and Present Owner: U. S. Government.

Present Use: Occupied by Post Office Department, used as Post Office, Federal Court Building and Federal Office building.

Statement of Significance: A Federal building representative of the late 19th century. Office space, filling in central core, constructed recently. There is some similarity to Spanish models such as the Palace of the Counts of Monterrey at Salamanca and the Alcazar at Toledo. This building was erected about 1890.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: A Post Office and Federal building exemplifying good materials, excellent craftsmanship, and modified Spanish Renaissance details.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent throughout.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Shape, dimensions, stories: Rectangular, faces north. About 75' x 120'. Granite, three stories with corner tower (four stories).
2. Foundations: Granite, 5' high. Rock-faced with smooth water-table course.
3. Wall construction: Granite ashlar (13-3/4" high--each course), first story rock faced and rusticated, upper stories smooth with quoins at salient corners; molded string courses at each floor level.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Main entrance is a triple arcade in the center of the north facade; secondary entrances on the street corner and east elevation are set in single arches. Each doorway is double, of varnished oak, with large glazed panel in upper two thirds (modern). Granite transom bar; opening above is glazed.

- b. Windows: First-floor windows are set in semicircular arched openings, with granite transom bar and plain glazing above.
- Second-floor windows are rectangular; those in the projecting pavilions, and at the main stair-landing, are divided by a granite mullion and transom bar. They are framed by fluted Roman Doric pilasters above pedestals, carrying pediments; they have corbelled balconies on thin brackets, with turned balusters. Windows in recessed walls have two tiers of pilasters, the lower ones fluted, the upper ones paneled; they carry a horizontal entablature. Openings have transoms.
- Third-floor windows are rectangular, with openings in pairs framed with three plain Doric pilasters carrying a horizontal entablature. Windows in recessed portions of the wall are in groups of five, lower than those in the pavilions but generally similar in detail.
- Tower windows, fourth-story level. Three arcaded windows on each face, with architrave, paneled keystone and molded import, framed in a Roman Doric order of stubby pilasters. Sash are one-over-one light, double hung, throughout.

5. Roof:

- a. Shape: Flat, with penthouses.
- b. Cornice: Granite with block modillions, with frieze and architrave, terminates the projecting pavilions; a lower entablature, without modillions, crowns the recessed sections of the wall. The central pavilion of each front except the west is pedimented; the remainder of the periphery has a granite balustrade, with molded balusters of square plan.

6. Facade composition:

- a. North: This has a projecting center pavilion three bays wide with pediment, end pavilions one bay wide, with a two-bay connecting link on each side. The connecting link east of center contains a large window at stair-landing height above the main floor.
- b. The south wall is composed similarly, except for the stair-landing window; a small one-story addition covers the center pavilion. The east wall is comparable, but shorter.
- c. The west wall has a two-story section to the rear of the end pavilion at the north corner.

7. Tower: A tower extends the end pavilion at the northeast corner of the building. It has a flat roof and balustrade.

C. Detailed Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

- a. First-floor plan: An L-shaped lobby extends the greater length of the north and east sides, with postal work space occupying the remainder of the floor. Near the northeast corner is an open-well stair. There is a secondary stair near the northwest corner.
- b. Second-floor plan: A large courtroom occupies the southwest corner; the rest of the peripheral area contains offices, served by a corridor which circumscribes a rectangular core space, which also contains offices. This core area appears to be a filled-in light court or sky-lighted hall.
- c. Third-floor plan: This is similar to the second floor, but without the courtroom.

2. Main stair: This is wide and has three landings, 13 risers, 5 risers, 5 risers, 9 risers. Treads have nosing below which the risers are of ornamental cast bronze. Treads, landings and wainscoting are of red marble with rich figuring. The closed stringers are of ornamental cast brass, as are the large posts of the railing. The railing consists of ornamental grilles--apparently wrought iron, gilded--set between cast brass posts in the form of Doric pilasters. The hand-rail is of mahogany, molded. One newel is formed by the brass pedestal of a column in the lobby, the other is square, with colonnettes set into the corners, and a heavy ornamental block with a finial whose faces carry relief arabesques. The first landing is enclosed by an ornamental grille.

3. Flooring is marble 9" x 20" pieces principally, in two tones of light-veined neutral pink color.
4. Walls are plastered above the wainscoting, painted. Ceilings have been largely covered with acoustical tile.

5. Trim:

- a. First floor

- (1) Doorways and doors in exterior walls. Openings are framed with mahogany trim, Doric pilasters above

the wainscot, the lower part paneled, the upper part fluted. They carry a horizontal entablature with dentil course; pilaster capitals are enriched with carved eggs and darts. A guilloche band ornaments the transom bar. Doors are mahogany, double, each paneled in six tiers of two molded panels with raised centers, except that the second tier from the bottom contains only one panel. Each door is hung on four large brass butts, and has an ornamental brass knob and escutcheon.

- (2) Window trim is similar to that of the exterior doors.
- (3) Wainscoting is marble, with black molded base, red figured marble die and molded cap.
- (4) Interior columns in the lobby are scagliola to match the wainscoting; they are Roman Doric, on octagonal brass pedestals which contain grilles in the panels.
- (5) Counter screens are of mahogany, in two tiers, the upper one resembling the door and window trim in miniature. The lower tier has a paneled wainscot, above which, between windows or letter boxes, are piers ornamented with Corinthianesque colonnettes on consoles.
- (6) Secondary stair near northwest corner: Open well, open string, two flights with one landing. Generally harmonious with main stair, but smaller and simpler.
- (7) Second-floor trim: Wainscoting of marble is like that of first floor. Trim of openings is mahogany; fluted Doric pilasters above wainscot carry a horizontal entablature with dentil course in cornice. Doors have two square panels in lower tier, one horizontal panel in the second tier, and two tiers of two panels each above. The trim of the inside core space is simple, and is a recent addition. Window trim is similar to that of the doors.
- (8) Third-floor trim: Generally similar to that on the second floor except that the heads of openings bear crossetted architrave moldings instead of an entablature.
- (9) Tower: A small cast-iron winding stair leads to the top.

- D. Site: This building occupies a corner lot and faces north on Broad Street with a secondary facade to the east on Meeting Street. Adjoining space is small, with modern paving. At the south is a one-story extension serving as a loading dock for mail trucks.

Prepared by Harley J. McKee, Architect
National Park Service
September 1963.

Addendum to:

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